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ABSTRACT

An investigation of attitudes relative to education in Appalachia is the focus of this 1971 paper. The heritage, culture, and characteristics of the Appalachian people are briefly described, and educational background of the youth is explored in terms of its relationship to educational attitudes. Also discussed are attitudes toward education as related to the inhabitants' educational and vocational aspirations. In keeping with this, studies reflecting educational attitudes of persons in West Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, and eastern Kentucky are cited. It is concluded that educational attitudes of Appalachian residents are related to level of income, size of family, occupational aspiration, and family influence, and it is suggested that research be focused on reducing the number of dropouts in the region's schools. (AN)

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ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES RELATIVE TO EDUCATION IN THE APPALACHIAN REGION

(Working paper prepared for a conference on Appalachia to be held at the Univeristy of Tennessee in April of 1971)

by

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ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES RELATIVE TO EDUCATION IN THE APPALACHIAN REGION

The focus of this paper is an investigation of attitudes relative to education in the Appalachian region (which encompasses counties from Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia). At attempt is made to furnish the reader with a background of the life-style, goals, and values of the people of Appalachia--especially as these relate to attitudes toward education. In addition, a brief discussion is presented on whether attitudes indeed need to be changed and, if so, methods for effective change.

The People of Appalachia

The heritage of the Appalachian people is varied. The native Indians were joined by a procession of groups including Spanish explorers and German and Scotch-Irish settlers. In his article "Appalachia--Discovered and Rediscovered," Loyal Jones (6) sketched the history of Appalachia. He noted that a unique culture was fostered in Appalachia and that the Appalachian value system, religion, and outlook on life were shaped by the environment.

The heavily wooded areas in the Appalachian mountain range have helped to create isolated cultural pockets where the life-style of the mountain people seems to be "somehow out-of-step with twentieth-century America..." (3). Due to the terrain, transportation and communication

are often difficult (8). Thus, the mountaineers are encouraged to cling to a value system which tends to inhibit changes in their life-style.

Jones (6) pointed out that the Appalachian people readily respond to opportunity, but a change in attitudes or values comes more slowly. In keeping with this, Thomas R. Ford (4) cited four characteristics maintained among the Appalachians which tend to limit cultural integration. These characteristics were also discussed by Donohew and Parker (3) in their monograph on impacts of educational change efforts in Appalachia:

> ...individualism and self-reliance, which he [Ford] says are viewed by the mountaineer not as a prerogative but a duty; traditionalism, a tendency to look more toward the past than to the future; familism, a reluctance to interreact with or settle near other than his own kin; and fundamentalism and fatalism, an emphasis on the rewards of the "next world" (possibly because rewards of this world were usually unattainable from the terrain) and an acceptance of whatever came to pass as "the Lord's will."

That people of Appalachia tend to resist change is further evidenced by Jack E. Weller's book on Appalachia which quoted a mountaineer as saying "things are alright as they are and change seems always for the worse" (18). Weller also noted that people living in isolated pockets have little contact with neighbors, who may well be relatives; in addition, contact with the outside world may also be limited since some Appalachian people may not even take a weekly newspaper.

Luther Tweeten (15) suggested that the rural person tends to care little about luxuries and considers independence, home, and

family to be very precious. Families are often large and ties are strong.

Youmans (16) noted that the Kentucky youth tends to marry young and is likely to start a family soon after marriage. Thus, it appears that the Appalachian youth views the future in terms of family and neighbors and not in terms of education.

Throughout Appalachia, scattered coal towns contain houses which reflect the basic poverty. An inhabitant of one such town reports that, due to the mining, plants and vegetables will not grow; this, too, contributes to the poor living conditions (17).

Although there has been a general trend toward urbanization in the United States, the 1960 census figures show that approximately 30 percent of the nation's population lives in rural areas. Appalachia is about 50 percent rural, and 62 percent of the entire southern Appalachian population lives in rural areas.

It must also be noted that, in recent years, the southern Appalachian region has undergone many changes. Hutchinson and Taylor (5) stated that

> Technical advances in transportation and communication have reduced isolation, and economic changes associated with increasing industrialization have resulted in the migration of many workers from rural to more urban areas both within and outside the Appalachian states.

However, research reviewed for this paper indicated that there now tends to be an equalization of in-migration and out-migration in the region.

In order to assess the attitudes toward education, it is necessary to examine the formal educational background of the region's inhabitants. In his 1969 article about Appalachian youth, James Branscome (1) reported that 65 percent of the region's students does not graduate from high school. Tweeten (15) noted that, in 1960, "the median number of years of school completed in five low-income counties of Kentucky ranged from 7.22 to 8.2 in 1960 versus the U.S. average of 10.6." Youmans (16), in his ten-year follow-up study of eastern Kentucky rural school dropouts, noted that more than one-half of the 307 youths interviewed had not graduated from high school; among these, the larger part had obtained only eight years of formal education. It should be noted that one-half of the respondents were living in rural eastern Kentucky and one-half had moved to urban southern Ohio or to other areas of Kentucky.

Oscar G. Mink and Laurence W. Barker (8) studied dropout proneness in Appalachia and reported that, of West Virginia public school students entering the ninth grade in 1961, only 61.8 percent graduated from high school four years later. Thus, West Virginia ranked forty-first in the nation in 1964 in the percentage of ninth graders who graduated.

The dropout rate in the Appalachian ghetto and suburbs of Cleveland, Ohio, was discussed by John D. Photiadis (10). He stated that "in both areas the same proportion of families (about 10%) have [sic] children who drop out of school." Suprisingly, the suburbs showed a larger proportion of families having two children who dropped out of

school. The majority of these children dropped out of school after the ninth year, "about 91.7 percent for ghetto and 80.5 percent for suburbs."

Stanley Ikenberry (7) reported that educational levels of persons 25 years old and older in the Appalachian portions of Kentucky, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia were 10.5 percent with fewer than five years of schooling; 33.4 percent with four years of high school or more; and 5.2 percent with four years or more of college. This may be compared to the rest of the United States, according to the same census, with persons 25 years and older: 8.1 percent with fewer than five years of schooling; 41.5 percent with four years of high school or more; and 7.8 percent with four years of college or more.

Photiadis (10) stated that "attitudes toward education can be affected by early family environment, or the way the individual perceives the role formal education plays in society." To substantiate the environmental influence on attitudes toward education, a study by Harvey Brazer and Martin David, as reported by Tweeten (15), gives a detailed breakdown of factors which determine a youth's education:

> Multivariate analysis based on a U.S. sample of 939 families was used to account for the variance in completed education of youth as related to characteristics of their parents and of their environment. The mean educational level was 11.82 years. Other things being equal, having an uneducated father reduced the completed education of the children by 1.6 years (table 2). Growing up in a household where the breadwinner was a farmer and had always been a farmer reduced education by 0.19 year. Being from a large family and being from the South each reduced education of children 0.54 year. If the family head possessed little motivation for achievement and believed that hard work was less important than luck, educational attainment of children dropped 0.26 year. Being from a fundamentalist church background lowered the education level another 0.55 year. Having

a father who was very young when the youth was born tended to take another 0.92 year from the educational level. Being in a Negro family reduced education by another 0.52 year.

Table 2. The estimated impact of parental and environmental factors associated with rural poverty on educational attainment of children

Item	Years of School Completed
Overall mean	11.82
Adjustments for	
Uneducated father	-1.60
Father a farmer	-.13
Father always lived on farm . . .	-.06
Large family	-.54
Low success drive of father . . .	-.26
Fundamentalist religion	-.55
Young father	-.92
Home in the South	-.54
Negro family	-.52
Maximum adjustment	-5.12
Group mean if all above factors are present	6.70

[Source: Brazer and David (2).]

It is obvious that being from a family possessing these characteristics seriously limits chances for educational attainment. The total effect if all factors are present is to decrease expected educational attainment by 5.12 years. When 5.12 is subtracted from the mean educational level of 11.82 years, the result suggests that a child in these circumstances would receive only 6.7 years of education. These factors associated with low educational attainment often are found in rural poverty areas.

Tweeten (15) suggested that perhaps poverty and low educational attainment result from "a concentration of negative factors in one family or area."

In a study by Sizer and Clifford (12) comparing in-migrants and natives of an industrialized West Virginia county, it was noted that 40 percent of the in-migrants had graduated from high school while 17.4 percent of the natives had graduated.

Youmans (16) found family size to be of significance in a study to determine the educational attainment and future plans of Kentucky rural youth. In addition, Sperry and Kivett (13) reported that "in general, the family has been found to exercise the greatest influence on the vocational choices which adolescents make." Other factors such as the economic cycle, religious affiliation, and extracurricular activities are supported by Sperry and Kivett (13) as affecting educational aspiration.

Educational Attitudes

The foregoing discussion of background of the people living in Appalachia provides perspective for a discussion of attitudes toward education as related to the inhabitants' educational and vocational aspirations. However, first it is necessary to determine the function of education in Appalachia. According to Schwarzweller and Brown (11), formal education in relation to change taking place in Appalachia is seen as an important mechanism aiding adjustment to the new society.

Photiadis (10) noted that the function of education can be seen

from two points of view. "First, it can be seen in terms of the preparation of new members for understanding the complexity of the new society and culture." According to Photiadis, this is very important to rural Appalachia due to its need for catching up and due to the internal and external social forces pressuring Appalachia to do so. "Secondly, the function of education can be seen as a means of social, occupational and, in turn, economic achievement which is also closely related to the level of living." The occupational and economic forms of achievement which are emphasized in American culture are particularly instrumental in development of favorable attitudes toward education. Photiadis pointed out that "formal education, then, is seen more among lower social strata as a means of responding to the societal demands for higher income and level of living." One use for education, then, is to equip rural migrants with the ability to make adjustments, both economic and cultural, to urban centers if and when necessary.

In a discussion of attitudes toward education, Photiadis (10) noted that in the four groups studied--West Virginia non-migrants, returned migrants, West Virginia residents in the Appalachian ghetto of Cleveland, and West Virginians in the Cleveland suburbs--it was found that the majority of respondents disagreed with the statement that "a man can learn more by working four years than by going to high school." Yet, a proportion of respondents agreed with the statement, particularly migrant suburbanites with comparatively more education.

A possible explanation could be that suburbanites perceive formal education as impractical in terms of their own immediate goals because in order for them to enter industries or to have better positions with the industries for which they work, technical skills are more important than, for example, two more years of education (10).

In a similar study by Sizer and Clifford (12), the in-migrant and native populations of Jackson County, West Virginia, were compared to determine effects of industrialization on educational attitudes. It was found that in-migrants, coming primarily from other counties in West Virginia, held attitudes significantly different at the .01 level from the natives--with the former showing more favorable attitudes toward education. To be more specific, in the total sample of in-migrants, 92.2 percent believed that things children learn in school are a great help while 81.3 percent of the natives believed the same.

Table 15 from the study reported by Sizer and Clifford (12) reflects educational attitudes of a subgroup from the total sample: those respondents having children in school. It should be noted that the natives ranked higher in the parent group than did the in-migrants when asked if they encouraged their children to continue education beyond high school (see page 10).

TABLE 15

Educational Attitudes of Parents of School Pupils,
Jackson County, West Virginia, 1965

Educational Attitudes	In-migrant N=94		Native N=58	
	Number Agreeing	Per Cent	Number Agreeing	Per Cent
Not Finishing High School is a Great Handicap	85	90.4	49	84.4
Things Children Learn in School are a Great Help ..	86	91.4	45	77.6
Very Disappointed if Child Quits Before Graduating...	93	98.9	55	94.8
Encouraged Children to Continue Education Beyond High School	77	81.9	49	84.5
Would Like Children to have College Education	87	92.5	46	79.3
Would take Money out of Savings to Send Children to School	93	99.0	52	89.7
Would be Willing to let Children go into Debt in Order to get More Education	78	83.0	47	81.0
Would be Willing to go into Debt Myself	88	93.6	51	87.9
Mean Score*	In-migrant 36.7		Native 34.9	

*The value of the difference of the two percentages for samples of this size could happen only by chance less than one time in a hundred.

In order to determine why the differences existed, the researchers controlled two variables: years of school completed and income. It was found that differences existed only at lower income and educational

levels.

Sperry and Kivetts' study of North Carolina rural youth (13) supported the concept that "boys' and girls' school plans and their parent expectations of these plans were significantly related to the family's level of living background." Plans which reflected educational attitudes were also associated with family size for the boys. It was also noted that students and parents did not often envision the student dropping out of school within a year or two of the study.

In a study of eastern Kentucky youth comparing high school dropouts with graduates, Youmans (16) found that more of the school dropouts than high school graduates in urban centers "said they would do things differently if they could start life over, and the principal change would be to get more formal education." Seventy-five percent of the men in Youmans' study indicated that a young man should be a college graduate.

Youmans (16) also noted that the rural school system of eastern Kentucky appeared able to "prepare young men for adult roles in rural areas, but that it was not so well-equipped to prepare rural youth for employment in urban areas."

Mink (8) developed a teacher-rated dropout-proneness scale which classified social, psychological, and/or educational forces into four primary groups--two of which, in particular, reflected attitudes toward education. The first of these groups, "negative identification with education," supported the commonly held belief that students

"who eventually discontinue do not have positive feelings about school and that these feelings are reflected by their behaviors." Mink and Barker (8) also noted that dropout groups were involved in fewer extra-curricular activities and formal school functions, which "probably reflects a feeling of not being a part of the school community. Excessive absenteeism also reflects a desire on the part of the dropout to stay away from a situation that is viewed negatively."

The other section on the Mink Scale which reflected educational attitudes was the section on family and socioeconomic status. Dropout and non-dropout groups were significantly differentiated in terms of (a) negative or apathetic parental attitudes toward education and (b) parental interest in school policies and practices. Findings indicated that dropouts as a group come from a lower socioeconomic class than non-dropouts.

In the same study by Mink and Barker (8), a self-report inventory for identification of potential dropouts was used. Most male and female dropouts in this study seemed to feel that education was of little use in improving their earning capabilities. This was demonstrated by their agreement with the statement that "a man can earn more by working four years than by going to high school."

The following quote, from a recent issue of Vista Volunteer (17), reflects the attitudes toward education of Estella Cole, an inhabitant of a coal town in Virginia:

> The schools are bad, education is bad. They're 19 or 20 when they graduate, if they graduate. The ones who go in

> the service see no opportunity here when they come back, but often they aren't prepared to live anywhere else. Most of the older men feel resentment at having dedicated so many years of their lives to the mines and come out with nothing.

Noting a similar problem and discussing a plan which has been implemented to change parental educational attitudes, Sara Murphy (9) described an unkempt rural home where a ninth-grade girl in an ill-fitting dress was doing sixth-grade work. The mother only complained that her daughter read too much. The method advocated by Murphy (9) to improve such parental attitudes toward education is home visitation by teachers. In many cases, home visits resulted in parents participating in school visitations. Murphy also noted that the increased parental participation was making its impact in that more students were staying in school to finish.

Youmans' study (16) found that, in eastern Kentucky, the male high school graduates as compared to high school dropouts had been "more successful in achieving higher status jobs, held higher job aspirations, participated more often in community organizations, and held a more optimistic outlook about the world and their place in it." Youmans also found that, between these groups, there were no significant differences in terms of such factors as unemployment rates and annual income. However, it was suggested that the lack of difference in annual income is due to dropouts being employed for a longer period of time than high school graduates; thus, dropouts are likely to have higher earnings than graduates just starting employment.

Despite the fact that their earnings were comparable to earnings of graduates, the dropout men indicated that they would do things differently if they could start life over, and the principal change would be to get more formal education.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this paper was to analyze educational attitudes held by the people in the Appalachian region. As can be seen by the studies cited, available research tends to indicate that educational attitudes are significantly related to the level of income, size of family, occupational aspiration, and family influence for the people of the Appalachian region.

Summarizing the necessity for education, Sperry and Kivett (13) stated that

> When compared to urban youth, rural youth have been found less likely to graduate from high school, to attend college, and consequently, to attain highly skilled occupations and professions. Advanced educational training is becoming increasingly important in occupational achievement. Therefore, mobility opportunities of the large proportion of rural youth who are migrating to urban areas will be highly dependent upon their educational attainment. These observations are of particular concern since investigations into the educational values of rural families indicate that both youth and their parents underestimate the importance of education in achieving in an occupation.

It might be concluded that one method of changing the educational attitudes of the Appalachian people would be to focus research and attention, as have several studies, on reducing the number of dropouts in the region's schools. Thus, since many students drop out in the

eighth or ninth grade, it would be necessary to motivate student interest in school particularly during that period. Perhaps if students felt that education would be helpful in attaining their future goals, they might be less likely to drop out.

Research should be conducted to determine the actual educational needs of the Appalachian people and how these needs may be met and attitudes changed.

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